



MACBITER

As if having to re-evaluate his lifelong commitment to the Mac wasn't enough, MacBiter is forced to do so by a didgeridoo-wielding whippersnapper

I have recently been shaken to the core by an experience which I propose to share with you Windows-using lot because I know it will make you very, very happy.

The other day I was a guest at one of those bring-your-own-washboard ad hoc musical evenings that give pleasure to the participants and cause bitter resentment among the neighbours. I won't go into the musical repertoire, drawn from a world gone by – think *Night and Day*, *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Blue Moon* and you'll get the idea – but naturally we had breaks for refreshments, and during one of these I was asked my opinion of modern computers: which to buy, the Mac or the PC?

The answer I gave was a well-reasoned distillation of the arguments

I have advanced in these pages for the past 18 years, delivered with fluent, compelling authority seasoned by my well-known charm and accompanied by a few deft, thoughtful blues licks on the piano.

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It was a bad moment

"The Mac," I concluded, "is the only way to fly and always has been. Isn't that so?" I asked my young host for confirmation, knowing that he would back me up ringingly; after all,

he does own and run a web-design company and is far more *au fait* with the practical state of the art than I am. The fact that he also plays a mean didgeridoo is neither here nor there.

"Bollocks!" he said.

That was not quite what I had expected and, shaken, I asked him to elaborate. He did so, pouring mild scorn on the modern Mac's inability to match the latest Pentia for power.

Seeing the expression of fatuous dismay which must have been written on my face, he added, consolingly – presumably remembering his duties as host – that the Mac had a lovely operating system, mind, nothing to touch it. But for serious work...

MAC ATTACK

I give you my word that this was the first time in my life that I had ever heard anybody who might be expected to know what he was talking about – and had no prior allegiance elsewhere, as do most hacks on *Computer Shopper* – rubbish the Mac, and I can tell you it was a bad moment. It wasn't made any better when my host, pouring oil on the troubled flames, added that he did still possess one Mac – a Mark I iMac in translucent pink – which he used when he hadn't got anything serious to do.

By now my teeth were grinding, because although I was using personal computers to make a living when this guy was still at school, there's no doubt he makes more money than me out of the things these days, and his opinion, formed at the sharp end of userdom as opposed to the effete dilettantism of yours truly, carries



more weight. I had to swallow it, change the subject and pass the canapés with good grace.

Afterwards, in the bleak night watches, I forced myself to consider if he might have been right.

SLIPPED RISC

Only after the Pentium series began to pull away from the PowerPC family in speed terms in the mid-to-late 90s did we start to hear the kinds of defensive arguments about "real-world performance" and "cacheing" that were Apple's attempt to put up a smokescreen against the fact that, against all expectations, both Intel and AMD had managed to see off the RISC challenge and were producing faster processors.

I advanced these arguments myself, time after time, and may even have believed in them. If I really wanted to push the Mac, however, I always fell back on the operating system as a selling-point, and there I was on firmer ground. The trouble is that most punters, then as now, think of computer processors as analogous to cars. Don't give me all that crap about safety coefficients and city mileage; how fast does it go and what's its nought-to-60 time?

Although processor speeds appear temporarily to have peaked at around 3.5 gigs for Intel and AMD and 2.5 for the Mac, the differential between the two families appears quite sufficient to handicap the Mac, if not in real-world performance – though my didgeridoo-playing friend would say different – then in perception. This is surely why Steve Jobs has torn up his treaty with IBM, just as Apple tore up an earlier treaty with Motorola for the same reason: to migrate from a chip family that is falling behind in the speed stakes.

GIVE ME FIVE

Consider the recent fiasco with the G5. If I may remind you, Apple, in an ill-advised attempt to make this chip seem faster than it is (though it is actually pretty fast, otherwise the PlayStation crowd wouldn't use them), adopted an ad campaign that was officially judged mendacious by one or the other of the ad watchdogs. Whatever the ins and outs of 64-bit processors, the ad's visual showed a Pentium machine being literally blown out of a building by the raw power of the new Apple computer.

The clear implication was that the G5 is faster in clock terms. But it isn't. It's one full gig slower, even with two of the bleeders plugged in side by side and working in parallel. So why did Apple adopt this risky – and as it turned out, badly miscalculated – strategy? Because it knew its chips

were slower, and it hadn't anywhere else to go.

Then there was the inconvenient fact that Apple's lovely PowerBook laptop was being handicapped by being stuck in the G4 era. The G5s on offer from International Business Machines were too hot for laptop use. Let us pass over the supposition that most of the world's punters will never need that kind of speed in their laptops – as a supposition it stinks – and concede that this was a body blow to the Counts of Cupertino. And this, all on its own, even without the residual perception of Macs as slow machines, was probably enough to cause Steve Jobs to take the go-with-Intel decision that so shocked the industry a few weeks ago.

This puts me rather in the position of the Iraqi gentleman known to the Americans as Baghdad Bob and to the Brits (with far subtler humour, I feel) as Comical Ali. (I refer to the chap who stood in front of Iraq's main buildings day after day telling the world's press that the Americans were getting a hammering by the fearless Republican Guard, and would never get anywhere near Baghdad. His last interview was conducted with American soldiers in the background mooning at the camera and waving signs saying 'Hi Mom'.) I'd been set up



mighty company such as Apple? You, who are even humbler than I (let's not mince words here), probably feel that being a hack with a regular column in a major computer magazine gives me an edge; but reader, that is to suppose that anybody of potential importance reads this page, when there has never been any evidence that this is the case. Let's take you, for example. Are you important? I don't think so – otherwise, why would you be wasting your time reading drivel when you could be out there in the thrusting

to be different. And if I now turn, snarling, on Apple, the Mac and all it has ever stood for, I would simply merge into the general background clutter of *Computer Shopper*, where every other column or article is about the PC and where every single one of the ads is for a PC product. If I did that, there'd be no reason to keep me on the strength, and before long I'd be joining the doleful queue outside Hastings Post Office on a Monday morning, giro in hand and sandwiches in pocket.

BITTER SQUEAK

It seems that revenge is not an option. This sense of bitter betrayal, acute though it is, is just another of life's vicissitudes to be taken squarely on the chin and lived with, like being a short arse or having a squeaky voice (and friends, there are hacks on *Shopper* who suffer from both these grave deficiencies at once, and some of them also have beards).

I can only pledge to do my best; I shall swallow the affront to my pride and continue to push the Mac in these pages, and if I have to take a large dose of Insincerity Pills and cross my fingers behind my back (not easy when typing) to get through it, you'll never know.

And in the mental contest that looms, I can at least take comfort from one fact: the opinion of a worldly hack who has been using computers for over 20 years is likely to weigh heavier in the minds of cultured people such as yourselves than that of a callow and arrogant youth who plays the didgeridoo. If it doesn't, then things are worse than I imagined. ☞

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I understand that Joseph Goebbels believed, almost to the end, that dozens of Wehrmacht divisions were coming to the relief of Berlin, and it would appear that Adolf believed it too. But nobody else believed it, which is why most of them, including Goering and the awful Himmler, made some attempt at a runner in the last days of the Third Reich. It seems I am not as smart as Goering or Himmler, since right up to the moment that Steve Jobs got on his hind legs at San Francisco and said "I love Intel", I was busily spouting the propaganda line about cacheing, real-world tasking and suchlike. Comical Ali and I are dorks from the same mould.

Now I feel disorientated – worse, I feel betrayed. And I want revenge.

APPLE HUMBLE

But how does a humble individual such as myself (actually I'm not that humble, but let's pretend I am for the sake of argument) take revenge on a

marketplace, adding hourly to your wealth and fame?

In fact, for years and years I have rubbished Apple time and again in any number of ways, though I have never rubbished the Mac itself, only the people who bring it to market. The fact that I am still here today, alive and well and with unbroken kneecaps, is proof positive that none of those Cupertino people has ever heard of this column, let alone read it. I have thought of testing this hypothesis by alleging, here in cold print, that Osama bin Laden is actually Steve Jobs wearing a towel on his head (Jobs' beard is significant here) or that over-frequent use of Macs exacerbates dormant paedophile tendencies, but here I feel the strange and censorious Gods of Libel, whose *modus operandi* is to hang around in the wings until the onstage hack has gone just that little bit too far, would probably step in and nail me.

In any case, as the sole supporter (ha!) of the Mac in this publication – and with a proportionate 3.5 per cent of the editorial space – I have a duty

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